

Securing the mission through strategic planning

NICOLA LADKIN

Abstract

The Museum of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, USA provides a centralized location where collections are made, researched, interpreted, exhibited, and preserved for the benefit of the academic and the broader community alike. In this way, the Museum exists and operates on the interface between the academic world and the wider world beyond. This situation gives the Museum something of an advantage in the current transitional academic climate. This does not mean, however, that the Museum is not challenged by demands placed upon it by the parent institution that is itself in transition. An increasingly diverse student body, opportunities presented by new technologies and related pedagogies, leadership succession concerns, and rising costs in the face of declining budgets, to name a few, all contribute to an academic identity in flux. In response, the Museum fulfills the traditional role of a university museum by providing the core functions of collections care, scholarly research, and exhibition and embraces the role as an interface between the university and the public by acting as a conduit for knowledge on heritage in both its tangible (collections) and intangible (information) forms. The Museum accomplishes this by aligning its academic and intellectual mission and vision with that of Texas Tech University. For practical purposes, this is achieved through a strategic planning process that also mirrors that of the University. Through identifying goals, critical success factors and objectives (including strategies and assessments) the Museum can prioritize all of its activities, from traditional object-based research to innovative public programming. In turn, this process assists in making the most of limited resources and raises the profile of the Museum both within the University and in the world outside.

The Cheshire Cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* gleefully states that if you don't know where you're going, it doesn't matter which way you go (CARROLL 1961). While he most assuredly was not talking about strategic planning, a lack of direction is symptomatic of an institution without a plan for how to succeed in the future. An effective way to find institutional direction and future success is through strategic planning.

Strategic planning is defined as "determining the optimal future for an organization and the changes required to achieve it" (LORD & MARKERT 2007: 4). It also is recognized as being a management tool. It is used for one purpose only and that is to help an institution do a better job. It does this by making an institution focus its direction, define agreed-upon goals, and assess and adjust direction in response to change. Strategic planning is a conscious effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what an institution is, what it does, and why it does it, all with a focus on the future. It involves setting goals and developing an approach to achieving those goals. The strategic planning process also raises questions that help planners anticipate the environment in which the institution will be working in the future). Acting strategically means being clear about institutional objectives, knowing institutional resources, and considering both when responding to a changing environment (Alliance for Nonprofit Management 2003).

Strategic planning is only useful if it is translated into strategic management. Strategic management requires an institution to formulate a mission and a vision for the future, develop a strategy to achieve the mission and vision, and create an institutional structure to successfully carry out the strategy. Although strategic planning is focused on the future, it does not attempt to make decisions for the

future. Strategic planning thus is dynamic and requires periodic evaluation and revision (Alliance for Nonprofit Management 2003).

There are many models for how to actually carry out strategic planning and recommendations on the details vary widely. Whatever model is used, there are some fundamental steps that must be taken. These are: preparation for planning; stating mission and vision; assessing the current institutional situation; developing strategies, goals, and objectives; and completing the written plan (Alliance for Nonprofit Management 2003).

Any process that takes much time, thought, and preparation can seem to be a daunting task in the face of busy schedules and ongoing daily activities, especially when it determines the future course for an institution. However, the benefits of planning outweigh the difficulties. The process of planning itself has the effect of educating and empowering those individuals involved in the process. The end product of the process, the planning document, is a tool that can be used to effectively and efficiently manage the institution (Alliance for Nonprofit Management 2003). For university museums, benefits derived from the planning process include production of a framework and a clearly defined direction that guides and supports the governance and management of the organization, improved quality of services and a means of measuring those services, the ability to set priorities and to match available resources to opportunities, and the ability to deal with risks from the external environment.

Established in 1923, Texas Tech University today maintains the flexibility and diversity that were embodied in the institution from the time of its founding by offering a combination of academic choices from the traditional degree programs to interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and vocational options. To support this interdisciplinary research, some sixty specialized research centers and institutes are located at Texas Tech. These include the Museum of Texas Tech University.

The Museum is an educational, scientific, cultural, and research element of Texas Tech University. Its mission states “the Museum of Texas Tech University, as an education resource for a diverse audience, collects, researches, and disseminates information about the natural and cultural heritage of local and related regions” (Museum of Texas Tech University 2005: 4). The stated purpose of the Museum is

“to support the academic and intellectual mission of Texas Tech University through the collection, preservation, documentation, and research of scientific and cultural material, and to disseminate information about those collections and their scientific and cultural topics through exhibition, interpretation, and publication for primary, secondary, and higher education students, the scholarly community, and the general public” (Museum of Texas Tech University 2005: 4).

A Texas Tech University Operating Policy and Procedure relating to strategic planning and assessments mandates that all areas and units of the University have a strategic plan, and participate in annual assessment of the plan (Texas Tech University 2008). The university-wide strategic planning process began in the 2000-2001 academic year and plans were completed in 2002, so use of strategic planning still is relatively new. The OP directs all areas and units to use the assessment reports to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs and operations. Furthermore, university administrators are directed to use the planning and assessments in decision-making and budget allocations, so there is a very real incentive for use of the strategic plan to guide effective management and improve performance.

The Museum is an operating unit of Texas Tech University. In order to support the academic and intellectual mission of the University, the Museum’s mission reflects that of its parent in its focus on the advancement of knowledge and service to humankind. However, the method by which the Museum meets its mission through collecting, researching and disseminating information is recognizable as

that of a traditional museum approach. The vision of the Museum of Texas Tech University is that it will “be a leader in developing the legal, ethical, and practical standards for generating, preserving, and using museum collections” (Museum of Texas Tech University 2007: 1). The Museum’s five-part vision statement is that it:

“will be a leading university museum in the nation; will provide leadership in professional museum practices; will be a research-intensive institution where faculty, staff, and student investigation enhances learning and provides a foundation for intellectual growth and achievement; will promote the values of social and intellectual exchange and understanding; and, will engage in the highest standards of museological practice” (Museum of Texas Tech University 2007: 1).

Echoes of the University’s vision are heard in the Museum’s desire to obtain national recognition and the advancement of knowledge through research, but practicing highest standards of generating, preserving, and using museum collections as the means to achieve this make the vision uniquely that of a museum.

The format of the Museum’s strategic plan is prescribed by guidelines from the Strategic Planning Council through the Office of the President of Texas Tech University. Every area and unit strategic plan must include a mission statement, a vision statement, and a number of goals that are supported by critical success factors and objectives. The critical success factors must be stated to allow each area or unit to evaluate its measure of success in meeting its goals over the next five years. The objectives must be supported by specific strategies designed to allow the objectives to be realized, and by assessments that allow the success of the strategies to be measured so that progress can be demonstrated. Use of such a hierarchical system allows the plan to organize information in such a way that it can be clearly understood and utilized. The relative levels of information in the hierarchy can be illustrated by the following scheme:

Goals
 Critical Success Factors
 Objectives
 Strategies
 Assessments

As a result of working through the strategic planning process that is described above and by following the University’s guidelines, the Museum now has a strategic plan that has identified five specific goals that it must accomplish. These goals are carefully selected and stated because they directly support the Museum’s mission. Goal One addresses institutional advancement, specifically to acquire and maintain quality collections that meet the mission and vision of the institution. Goal Four addresses programmatic advancement, specifically to increase public and academic educational programming by creating new programs and enhancing existing programs (Museum of Texas Tech University 2007). Both of these goals address the core functions of the Museum to collect, research, and disseminate information.

Goals Two, Three, and Five more subtly address the mission. Goal Two addresses professional achievement, specifically to maintain accredited status by oversight organizations. Continued accreditation is important for the Museum because it confers prestige and a high level of achievement that can be demonstrated to the University and the public. Goal Three addresses public and professional initiatives, specifically to build partnerships with opportunities for museum and university faculty and staff, while Goal Five addresses museological achievement, specifically to cultivate professional relationships through increased staff participation in area, regional, national, and international museum organizations. These two goals focus on professionalism, partnerships, and

participation, all of which are very necessary not only to meet the mission as a quality institution of today, but also to realize the vision of the future.

The Museum's strategic planning goals are very broadly stated. For this reason, the critical success factors are written to express the goals in terms that can be translated into real action. The objectives are written to give the goals specific definition. Strategies are written to illustrate the necessary actions in detail, and assessments are written to provide a measure of how well the objective has been realized. For example, Goal One is institutional advancement - to acquire and maintain quality collections that meet the mission and vision of the institution. Critical success factors for this goal are: to increase and enhance research and interpretive collections; to initiate models and techniques for collecting, data collecting, and data mining; to explore and exploit emergent technologies related to collections and collection data management; and to integrate the use of technology in teaching and learning processes. The first objective for this goal is to increase and enhance research and interpretation collections. Strategies designed to meet this objective are: to enhance the art, ethnology and textiles, and history collections with objects that complement current collections; to increase investigation and collection of early vertebrates remains related to West Texas area; to increase the range of specimens in the Natural Science Collection; to continue research at the Lubbock Lake Landmark and the region to add to the information base about early inhabitants of the Southern Plains; and to increase fundraising to support and enhance museum collections. Assessments to measure if this objective has been realized are: number of objects added to the collections; number of natural science specimens; amount of research projects, publications, and website visits; number of tissue requests; number of fossils collected; and amount of funds raised. Each of the other four goals of the strategic plan are developed and expressed in the same manner (Museum of Texas Tech University 2007).

As illustrated, information in the Museum's strategic plan is organized from the broad and general to the detailed and specific. At the level of objectives, strategies, and assessments the specific activities clearly illustrate what the Museum must do in order to meet its goals. Other actions that are not in the strategic plan therefore are not a priority. When tough choices have to be made, having the plan facilitates strategic decision-making and any accompanying necessary allocation of resources. Having the plan makes choosing the best course of action easier.

Strategic planning only helps secure the mission if the plan is actually used as a tool to guide decision-making and actions (McNAMARA 1997). When put into practice, the plan can produce positive results. During the most recent assessment it was discovered that the Museum had met several of its objectives and had moved closer to meeting some of its goals. Disconcertingly, a poor job had been done in expressing some specific strategies and assessments so that the assessments didn't assess anything at all. These were revised at the earliest opportunity.

The modern university museum is not only about individual curatorial goals but also is about meeting an institutional mission and vision that places the museum at the heart of service to society and its development. Using strategic planning to remain focused on core mission in times of change allows for collections to be developed and preserved for those entrusted with this important responsibility for the future.

Literature cited

- Alliance for Nonprofit Management 2003. Frequently asked questions: Strategic planning. www.allianceonline.org?FAQ/strategic_planning (accessed November 24, 2008).
- CARROLL, L. 1961. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London: The Folio Society

- LORD, G.D. & K. MARKERT 2007. *The manual of strategic planning for museums*. Lanham: Alta Mira Press.
- MCNAMARA, C. 1997. Strategic planning (in nonprofit and for-profit organizations). www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan.htm (accessed November 24, 2008).
- Museum of Texas Tech University 2005. Collections management Policy. www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu (accessed November 24, 2008).
- Museum of Texas Tech University 2007. Strategic plan. www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu (accessed November 24, 2008).
- Texas Tech University 2008. O.P. 10.13 Strategic planning and assessment for Texas Tech University, including all academic programs and support operations. www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/contents.php#01 (accessed November 24, 2008).

Contact

Nicola Ladkin

Assistant Director

Museum of Texas Tech University and Center for Advanced Study of Museum Science and Heritage Management

Museum of Texas Tech University

Address: 3301 4th Street, Box 43191, Lubbock, Texas 794093191, USA

E-mail: [nicky.ladkin\(at\)ttu.edu](mailto:nicky.ladkin@ttu.edu)

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/>

